

# 2007 Pard'ners Award Winners Mike Tracy & Aron Moon+//



BY TROY M. SMITH

**A** year after winning the Arabian Horse Association's Distance Horse of the Year award, Aron Moon+// and his owner, Mike Tracy, were awarded one of the American Endurance Ride Conference's top honors: the 2007 Pard'ners Award.

Named for Mae Schlegel and her longtime mount, Pard, this award honors those horse and rider partners who engender a spirit of friendship, enthusiasm and championship—yet always keep good sportsmanship their first priority.

**'In 2007, after 18 straight years of competition, I decided to take some time off. It works wonders. In 2008 I'm raring to go.' —Mike Tracy**

The bond between Mike and Aron Moon+// has been strengthened over 19 years of competing together—not only in endurance, but in ride & tie, competitive trail, and triathlons as well. In their first year of competition, when Aron Moon+// was 5, Mike recalls, "We were both green, and I got thrown off a number of times. It took quite a while for us to bond."

Their early years were a definite challenge. They had rides marred by a tumble into a creek and near-drowning (Western States 60) and a split coronet band after falling during a river crossing (AHA National Endurance Ride, 2000). The latter necessitated repair (with chewing gum and a torn-off

jacket sleeve!) that allowed the duo to make the six miles to the next vet check.

When presenting the award at the 2008 national awards banquet, Robert Ribley gave a humorous account of Aron Moon+// and Mike's first ride. "They came down the trail and the horse looked great, but the rider was bouncing every which way," recounted Robert. "Luckily they have improved over the last 19 years."

Mike recalls thinking, "When Robert started talking about a rider who kept getting thrown off his horse, a rider who used a Thoroughbred racing saddle, a rider who pulled his horse in a single-axle wooden horse trailer in which his horse rode backwards, I thought, 'That sounds like me and Moon.'"

"It was an honor" to have Robert and Melissa present the award, said Mike, who has crewed for the Ribleys at Tevis. "You won't find nicer people," he said.

In his acceptance speech, Mike noted that it's all about the horse. "You take care of him or her and they will take care of you down the trail," he said. "In my case, I just happened to get an exceptional animal. In fact, in the Bible at 1 Corinthians 4:7 it says, 'For who makes you to differ from another? Indeed, what do you have that you did not receive? If, now, you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as though you did not receive it?' So, I don't boast at any accomplishment. I just give thanks to Jehovah God for the gift of Aron Moon+//."

Moon, a 15'1-hand half-Arabian gelding born in 1983, has

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averaged 6.1 rides started per season, with an average of 5.2 completions. His total career mileage stands at 5,625—and that's with only one Pioneer ride. He has completed 15 100-milers.

All this with a 215-pound rider—well, except for one ride in 1998 when Judy Houle took a turn on Moon.

Mike and Moon have watched out for each other for all their years in competition. On Moon's first Tevis ride, in 1992, the pair came into a checkpoint late in the ride. "The volunteer said they didn't have any horse water, just people water. So I took the water and put it in my scoop and gave it to Moon," said Mike. "The lady said that we were real partners. I ended up running a lot that day—so much so that I finished the ride with two sprained ankles."

After a year off, Mike and Moon are back on the trail in 2008, already completing an LD ride in March. "It's funny you hear about giving your horse some time off all the time," said Mike. "In 2007, after 18 straight years of competition, I decided to take some time off. It works wonders. In 2008 I'm raring to go."



The Pard'ners Award was a culminating accomplishment for Aron Moon+//, sired by Ha Shah Ghaleb and out of a grade bay mare. He has already been honored by the

International Arabian Horse Association as a half-Arabian Legion of Excellence award-winning horse.

Other highlights of this team's career have been six Tevis Cup and two Race of Champions completions. So far, the pair have 96 completions in 111 starts, with 39 top tens. They were also winners in the 2000 short-course World Ride & Tie Championship, have won in competitive

trail, and completed the Almaden Triathlon four times.

When Aron Moon+// was honored for completing 5,000 AERC miles, Mike wrote, "Aron Moon has God-given ability. He has been too successful to say that I had a large part in his success. . . . I'm sure the way I rode him, his diet, shoeing, etc., had something to do with his long, successful career. But you can't buy heart. Jehovah gave him that.'

"He exemplifies what endurance is all about," said Mike, "when you are tired, hungry, sore, and you still strive to finish, because to finish is to win."